

Ending Cancer as We Know It

An Interview with Sung Poblete, PhD, RN, Chief Executive Officer, Stand Up To Cancer (SU2C)

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining SU2C in 2011, Sung Poblete held senior level positions with a focus on patient outcomes, disease management and health services research at a subsidiary of Fresenius Medical Care and Oxford Health Plans Foundation, among others. In all of her professional activities, Poblete has brought innovation and groundbreaking initiatives to new and evolving nonprofit and corporate healthcare environments. Poblete has received grants from the Centers for Disease Control and



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Prevention, National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation and private foundations. She also served as a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – UC Health Systems Public Scholar from 1999 to 2000. She currently serves on the Executive Board of the Osteosarcoma Institute and is on the Board of Directors of Stand Up To Cancer–Canada, the Preparedness and Treatment Equity Coalition, Apricity Health, and Proteus Ocean Group. She is also on the Medical Advisory Board of Medically Home Group and Nok Nok's Advisory Board. Additionally, Poblete is one of New York Consolidated's Founding Partners, an organization dedicated to increasing equity through art and publishing. Poblete earned her BS, MS and PhD in nursing from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, where she also began her teaching career over 25 years ago. She continues to serve Rutgers as a visiting associate professor at the School of Nursing. In 2016, Poblete was inducted into Rutgers Hall of Distinguished Alumni.

INSTITUTION BRIEF Stand Up To Cancer® (standuptocancer.org) was created to accelerate groundbreaking research that will get new therapies to patients quickly and save lives now. SU2C brings together the best and the brightest in the cancer community, facilitating collaboration to help new therapies move from the laboratory to the patient, to help more people diagnosed with cancer become long-term survivors. By galvanizing the entertainment community, SU2C creates awareness and educates the public on cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment and raises funds to support these efforts. The SU2C movement began in 2008, mandating collaboration among the cancer community, with its revolutionary “Dream Team” concept, uniting top researchers from different institutions to work together on promising new approaches and compete against cancer instead of against each other.

Will you highlight the history of Stand Up To Cancer and how you define its mission?

Stand Up To Cancer® (SU2C) was established in 2008 to accelerate groundbreaking research that gets new therapies to patients quickly and saves lives now. Our co-founders, who are all leaders in the entertainment industry, set out to galvanize the entertainment community to raise awareness and funding for cancer research. They were able to secure

MLB as our founding donor and then went on to officially launch SU2C in an incredibly innovative way with our inaugural televised fundraising special. The special was unprecedented at that time because we were able to secure all three major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) to donate an hour of airtime. It really helped to launch SU2C in a big way. Since then, SU2C has produced six subsequent “roadblock” telecasts, which share SU2C's work and mission with millions of viewers across the U.S. and Canada.

SU2C saw an urgent need to fund cancer treatments with the potential to move quickly from laboratory to bedside. To accelerate that process, we took a unique approach to research by mandating collaboration within the cancer community. Since then, we have been able to bring together more than 2,000 of the best and brightest researchers from 210 different institutions to compete against cancer instead of against each other. This has led to nine FDA approvals for cancer treatments supported by SU2C-funded research.

The efforts we have made and will continue to make towards our mission of ending cancer as we know it are not possible without fundraising support. We are incredibly grateful to our corporate, philanthropic and organizational donors, as well as all of the individual donors who believe in our cause. With this support, SU2C has raised over \$746 million since 2008 to further our mission and get life-saving therapies to those who need them most.

Will you provide an overview of the work of Stand Up To Cancer and its key initiatives?

We are committed to ensuring that cancer research and prevention is equitable, prioritized, and well-funded so that we don't have to see more people die from this terrible disease.

SU2C-funded researchers work relentlessly to quickly develop and offer the newest, most effective and most promising cancer treatments to patients through our unique funding models. In addition to our core Dream Team research projects, Stand Up To Cancer's various grant types aim to find, accelerate, tailor or prevent cancer in new and innovative ways.

Education and awareness are also key in the work we do. Increasing the public's knowledge of cancer prevention, clinical trials and cancer research in every community is critical to improving cancer health equity. Thanks to our connection to the entertainment industry, we have been fortunate to receive a constellation of donated assets that help to drive our efforts to make cancer research a first-tier issue. Our education and awareness efforts span our biennial telecasts, our public service announcements and digital campaigns, targeted strategic communications and advocacy and community collaborations.

Stand Up To Cancer is a leader in cancer research. Will you discuss Stand Up To Cancer's unique research models and how they are designed to initiate collaboration, accelerate the pace of cancer research, and clear the way for high-impact breakthroughs?

SU2C has a rigorous, peer-reviewed funding model that originated with our initial Dream Teams and was rooted in changing the culture and pace of cancer research through collaboration between cancer researchers from multiple institutions and disciplines. We recognize that innovation comes from a multidisciplinary team with each investigator contributing to a portion of the solution.

Other Stand Up To Cancer research models include SU2C Convergence, which brings together biological, physical, and computer sciences to better understand cancer biology in order to more quickly tailor treatments for individual cancer patients; SU2C Catalyst, which brings together industry and academic scientists to rapidly accelerate clinical trials of new treatments and combination therapies; and SU2C Cancer Interception, which aims to find and treat cancer at the earliest possible point, perhaps even before a cancer cell has fully formed. These milestone-driven projects are competitively selected and overseen by leaders in cancer research and proactively managed by SU2C.

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In these ways, we are tackling cancer from multiple directions; I believe this is something that continues to make Stand Up To Cancer a unique organization.

What was the vision for creating Stand Up To Cancer’s Health Equity Initiative?

SU2C began formalizing its Health Equity Initiative in 2017 with the initial goal of increasing diverse participation in the clinical trials we fund. We formally announced this initiative in 2020. Our outstanding Health Equity Committee, which is comprised of experts with deep knowledge of health equity in the context of cancer research and precision medicine, guides our health equity efforts. As a part of this initiative, all SU2C-supported research grant proposals must address recruitment and retention of racially and ethnically diverse patients in cancer clinical trials. We’ve continued to grow this initiative to also include collaborations with the cancer advocacy community; targeted public service campaigns focused on improving awareness about cancer screening, prevention and clinical trials; and funding research that focuses on reducing cancer disparities and improving cancer outcomes and screening rates in medically underserved communities.

Over the last two years, we have funded three new research teams dedicated to addressing cancer inequities in multiple cancer types. Our SU2C Health Equity Breakthrough Team is addressing the low participation of medically underserved communities in cancer clinical trials in the New York City area. The team will focus on breast, prostate and liver cancers, which disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minority groups. The SU2C Colorectal Cancer Health Equity Dream Team is taking an innovative and comprehensive approach to improve colorectal cancer screening in medically underserved communities in three SU2C Zones: Greater Boston, Los Angeles

and Great Plains Tribal Communities in South Dakota. The SU2C Lung Cancer Health Equity Research Team will focus on reducing lung cancer disparities in Black Americans in Virginia and the Carolinas, and that’s just the beginning of the health equity-focused research we will be funding in the years to come.

How did Stand Up To Cancer adapt the way it works to address the challenges caused by the global pandemic?

Like many organizations, we had to pivot when the pandemic began. For example, we were in the planning stages of our 2020 telecast and had to postpone and redesign the event, which instead aired in 2021. We developed plans to ensure that all our researchers could continue their critical work through flexible deadlines and tailored support.

Due to many medical procedures being postponed across the globe, we made it a priority to educate and increase awareness about the importance of staying current with routine preventative medical care such as cancer screenings. SU2C also served as a resource to cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers by developing a COVID-19 resource page and launching a series of videos highlighting important COVID-19-related information for the cancer community. We also worked with one of our SU2C-funded scientists at Massachusetts General Hospital to ensure cancer patients were included in a COVID-19 symptom tracker mobile phone application.

Despite the challenges faced, there were many highlights that showed the spirit and resilience of our researchers to adjust to a new normal while keeping our mission at the forefront. One of those highlights was the announcement of two FDA approvals supported by SU2C-funded research. As we continue to navigate the changing pandemic landscape, leveraging the research community’s sense of

urgency instigated by the pandemic will be crucial in the continuing fight against cancer. These unprecedented times have shown us that we can come together and collaborate to develop amazing treatments and I know we can address cancer with the same urgency.

How valuable is it in your role to have such an engaged group of founders and advisors?

Our co-founders are incredibly passionate about our mission, and I am tremendously thankful for their continued support and involvement. We are also fortunate to have a very engaged Board of Directors and Scientific Advisory Committee. As a CEO, it is extremely valuable to have that level of support and diversity of thought to ensure that we are always challenging ourselves to innovate and break down barriers in our efforts to achieve our mission.

You have made it your life’s work to fight cancer. Where did your passion for this work develop and what makes the work so special to you?

My passion for this work started with my career in nursing. At around 10 years old, I was inspired to pursue the nursing field when my aunt was diagnosed with breast cancer. I visited her in the hospital every day during her treatment and was in awe of the incredible healthcare providers delivering unbelievable care with such compassion. Witnessing that made me want to be a part of the field; I wanted to be in service of others. After completing my bachelors and master’s degrees, I was invited to join the teaching faculty at Rutgers University College of Nursing, which was a huge honor. This was a springboard for me in so many ways because it gave me opportunities to work in a world that prioritized connectivity.

Early in my career, I lost so many people I loved and admired to cancer. I was shocked to learn the statistics, and eventually I got to the point where I wanted to do something to stem the tide of cancer, instead of watching from the sidelines. Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the U.S. and the leading cause in Canada. More than 1.9 million people in the U.S. are anticipated to be diagnosed with cancer in 2022. That’s why we absolutely must make cancer research a top-tier priority.

Looking back, I’d say that my professional paths as a nurse, an educator, a researcher and now an advocate and CEO were ones that the women in my family and the women I saw on the hospital wards helped me pursue and become passionate about – both because it was modeled for me in general and by their specific examples.

When you are addressing the issue of cancer that requires a long-term focus and commitment, how important is it for you and your team to take moments to reflect and celebrate the wins along the way?

Celebrating our wins and successes is so important in the work we do. Whether it’s an FDA approval supported by our research, an inspiring story from a patient who has benefitted from our work, or an awareness campaign that brings an impactful message to the public, it motivates all of us to continue to work towards making every cancer patient a long-term survivor. ●